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ABSTRACT

The first phase of the Paulo Freire Method for reading instruction in Latin America is a study of the context in which the illiterates live. This helps to determine both common vocabulary and the problem issues around which the processes of reflection could develop. The second phase involves the selection of words from the common vocabulary. Three criteria govern this choice: the words should include the basic sounds of the language; the vocabulary, when organized, should enable the pupil to move from simple letters and sounds to more complex ones; and the words should be chosen for their potential capacity to confront the social, cultural, and political reality. The third phase of the method develops teaching materials of two types. One type is a set of cards or slides which break down the words into parts for careful analysis. The second type is a set of cards of pictorial situations, related to the words, which are designed to impress on the pupils images of the words and also to stimulate his thinking about the situation that the word implies. The key to the successful implementation of the method is the coordinator, who does not teach but tries to promote self discovery in the other participants through exploring the dimensions of the pictures. (WR)

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THE PAULO FREIRE METHOD

by Thomas G. Sanders

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ALAN W. HORTON
Executive Director

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THE PAULO FREIRE METHOD

Literacy Training and Conscientización

by Thomas G. Sanders

June 1968

Latin America shares the problem of high illiteracy rates with other parts of the underdeveloped world. The exact extent of the problem is difficult to determine because people differ in how they define literacy. Brazil, for example, considers a person literate who can write his name, but the country abounds with people who can meet this requirement and still cannot read and write. Alongside unquestioned illiterates who have had no education at all, we find the category of "semi-literates," made up of individuals who have usually attended school for limited periods but who have forgotten or cannot function with what they were taught, so that in practice they neither read nor write. Thus, the estimates of illiteracy in Chile range from 15 to 30 per cent, depending on one's definition.

We rarely ask why countries should combat illiteracy because the answers seem so commonplace: e.g., to raise the cultural level of the society, to provide minimal knowledge so that the bulk of the population can undertake more complex roles in development, to incorporate all of the population more effectively into the structure, values, and functions of society. Until recently, at least in theory, even the most traditional groups agreed on the desirability of education, usually arguing that only then would the lower classes deserve to participate in political, social, and economic processes.

In Latin America today, however, literacy training has become a controversial issue. The region, long imitative of European and North American educational theory and techniques, has now produced an innovating method of "alfabetización" which may also represent a contribution to our understanding of social change. Its key concept of "conscientización" (or "conscientização" in Portuguese) has spread from its origin in Brazil to become common usage in Spanish-speaking countries and has also recently entered the French vocabulary. Thoughtful and critical

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Latin Americans (as well as those linked with the maintenance of existent structures) no longer think of learning to read as acquiring a mere technical skill, but as a process implying values, forming mentalities, and leading to social and political consequences. In fact, literacy training may become revolutionary.

The chief intellectual architect of this change is an amiable Brazilian named Paulo Freire, who was one of the victims of the Brazilian military coup of April 1964. Jailed for seventy days, he chose to move to Chile rather than face what seemed the probability of further preventive arrest, and he currently works quietly as an educational consultant in ICIRA, an agency of the United Nations dedicated to research and the training of personnel for the Chilean agrarian reform. The method Freire developed is sometimes called by his name, but it is also known as the "psycho-social method."

For purposes of comparison, it is worth noting that Brazil's Communist-chasing government rejected the method as "subversive" and has since tried every witch-hunting technique to efface vestiges of conscientização from educational programs in the country. In Chile, on the other hand, the method was officially adopted in 1965 for all government programs of literacy training.

Paulo Freire was professor of the history and philosophy of education at the University of Recife until 1964; and as early as 1947 he had become interested in adult education, especially among the illiterates who formed the majority of the population of Northeast Brazil. Being a professor of pedagogy, he was, of course, familiar with the standard methods, but he felt dissatisfied with them. For one thing, they used essentially the same material for adults as for children. Furthermore, the language and situations common in the primers were drawn from urban middle-class life and bore little if any relation to the problems and interests of the lower classes, chiefly rural, that he was trying to teach. Most fundamentally, however, Freire was concerned with the philosophical assumptions about the relative status of teacher and pupil and the psychological effect on the pupil of the existent methods. Culture was regarded as intimately linked with literacy (the word culto in both Portuguese and Spanish conveys a sense of polished literary elegance), and the teacher in bestowing this "culture" on the ignorant pupil, intensifed the sense of subordination and worthlessness that he as a member of the lower class already suffered. Thus the learning process was by its nature paternalistic, making education only one more manifestation of the normal class relations of Latin America. Even more, Freire puzzled over why he was teaching these people to read and write: Was it to appropriate the values and assume the roles of a society that was stratified and dehumanizing?

He recognized that education aimed at adapting pupils to a society that he, like other critical Brazilians, believed should change.

Turning his back on the textbooks, Freire began to reflect on and absorb ideas from three sources from which his method was to emerge:

(1) The language, culture, and problems of the illiterates themselves.

(2) Philosophies of knowledge, human nature, culture, and history. The aspect of Freire's thought that I feel most guilty about neglecting for lack of space is its profound philosophical rootage; for this Brazilian, with his provincial Northeastern appearance and mannerisms, has built a system of literacy training upon categories and concepts drawn from the phenomenology of Husserl, existentialists like Buber and Mounier, Marxist humanists like Schaff, the psychoanalytical theory of Fromm, and a whole range of philosophers of science and language.

(3) The analyses of underdevelopment that began to have an impact on Latin Americans after World War II. Like many other Brazilians, Freire concluded that an older epoch of backwardness, dependence, and immobility was being replaced by one of new economic orientations, industrialization, greater national autonomy, and class mobility. Politically and culturally, a "closed" society was moving toward an "open" society; the traditional interpretations of such themes as democracy, popular participation, liberty, property, and authority were seeking new content. In Freire's words, "Education, therefore, in the phase of transition that we were living, became a highly important task. Its strength would derive chiefly from our capacity to incorporate ourselves into the dynamism of the epoch in transition." The trauma of change began to divide society into two groups: (a) those who did not understand the necessity of modernization and used paternalism and massification to inhibit it; and (b) those eager to participate in the changes. As an educator and interpreter of this process, Paulo Freire felt that his field and function were to form a population capable of participating rationally, critically, and democratically in both the present and future of the country.

Between 1960 and 1963, Freire's reading and thinking, on the one hand, and his immersion in the life of the people and problems of Brazilian development, on the other, began to jell into a system. The principal catalyst was his participation in the Movement of Popular Culture in Recife, where such themes as nationalism, remission of profits, development, and illiteracy were discussed in groups, using visual aids to schematize the issues. So satisfactory were the results of these dialogues in awakening the consciousness of the participants that Freire decided to

try the same methods with literacy training. But was it possible to transform the mentality of a rural worker, illiterate all of his life, from passive ingenuousness to critical participation at the same time that he was learning to read?

Freire distinguishes between a "magical," or unreflective, way in which man may confront the world around him and a "critical" vision of that world. He wanted to reform the illiterate's basic perspective on reality, which has usually been a profound pessimism and fatalism, by enabling him to gain awareness of his capacity to shape his environment and to acquire the means to do so. Literacy training should not immerse the pupil in his status, but rather give him the capacity to overcome it.

Why take this approach rather than the older one? Freire contends that all pedagogical methods imply a concept of man and society. There is no neutral education. Traditional theories of literacy training have tried to adjust man to a given society, while their methods treated him as an "object" into which superior beings poured knowledge. For Freire, however, man is not an object. Man's "ontological vocation" is to be a subject who works upon and changes the world. "If man is a being transforming the world, the educational task is different . . . . If we look on him as a person, our educational task will be more and more liberating."

Nevertheless, in Latin America the masses cannot express this destiny. To speak of humanization as the basic object of man's existence points to the presence of dehumanization, the product of centuries of exploitation, of which the prevalent illiteracy is only a manifestation. The educator facing a class of illiterates finds himself with an option: to maintain their dehumanization through what he does with them or to work toward the fulfillment of their human potential. It was precisely this problem that disturbed Freire, for he felt that the available methods gave no choice except to perpetuate attitudes of passivity and ingenuousness.

The Paulo Freire method makes of literacy training a critical, active process through which habits of resignation are overcome. The critical capacity of the pupils grows out of dialogue about meaningful situations in their life, on which they have insights to contribute. Both teacher and pupils join sympathetically in a common purpose, seeking truth about relevant problems while respecting each other's opinions. The teacher serves as the co-ordinator of a discussion, while the pupils become participants in a group trying to understand existence in a changing society.

As a basis for the discussions, Freire believed that he could isolate a minimal core vocabulary touching on life situations, which would also point to issues stimulating discussion and the awakening of critical

consciousness. For a Brazilian or Chilean peasant, learning to read through such sentences as "Run, Spot, run" is only alienating.

Thus the first phase of the method became a study of the context in which the illiterates lived, in order to determine the commom vocabulary and the problem issues around which the process of reflection could develop. Through informal conversations, a team of educators studied the thinking, problems, and aspirations of a given community. While the Paulo Freire method assumes that themes of national importance play a role in the development of a critical mentality, it also assumes that the presentation of them should be linked to the personal, local problems of the person seeking education. The deeply contextual orientation of the method is illustrated by the fact that Freire developed different lists of words and situations for rural and urban illiterates, and even for different regions of Brazil. After his move to Chile, Freire had to begin all over again and learn the vocabulary, mentality, and problems there.

The second phase involves the selection of words from the vocabulary that has been discovered, "those most charged with existential meaning, and thus, major emotional content, but also the typical expressions of the people." Three criteria govern this choice.

The first is the capacity of the words to include the basic sounds of the language. Both Spanish and Portuguese words are based on syllables, with little variation in vocalic sounds and a minimum of consonantal combinations. Freire discovered that sixteen to twenty words sufficed to cover the sounds.

The second criterion is that the vocabulary, when organized, should enable the pupil to move from simple letters and sounds to more complex ones. Experience and insight contribute to an understanding of the problems an illiterate has in learning to read and write. Because the feeling of confidence in mastering these techniques is important, difficulties should be graduated so that they can be more easily overcome: "Each success that the illiterate has in overcoming a new difficulty gives him internal satisfaction, increases his interest and learning, and gives him greater confidence in himself."

The third criterion is that words are chosen for their potential capacity to confront the social, cultural, and political reality. The words should provide mental and emotional stimulation—that is, they should suggest and mean something important. "House," for example, carries a meaning linked not only to the daily life of the family, but also to local and national housing problems. "Work" provokes a range of associations with the nature of human existence, economic functions, co-operation, and unemployment.

The following lists of words are those that were used in two different contexts: List I was selected for use in the state of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, a rural area satellite to a large city; List II for use in rural sections of Chile:

I		II	
favela	slum	casa	house
chuva	rain	pala	shovel
arado	plow	camino	road
terreno	plot of land	vecino	neighbor
comida	food	zapato	shoe
batuque	a popular dance with African rhythms	escuela	school
poço	well	ambulancia	ambulance
bicicleta	bicycle	sindicato	union
trabalho	work	compañero	companion
salário	salary	radio	radio
profissão	profession	harina	flour
govêrno	government	chiquillo	boy
mangue	swamp (also the zone of prostitution in Rio)	yugo	yoke
engenho	mill	trabajo	work
enxada	hoe	guitarra	guitar
tijolo	brick	fábrica	factory
riqueza	prosperity, wealth	pueblo	people

A very interesting vocabulary has also recently been developed for prisoners in Chile, including such words as salida (getting out), visita (visit), abogado (lawyer), and libertad (freedom).

Why operate with a minimal number of words rather than use a primer that can constantly supply new vocabulary and sentences? Freire

believes that no primer is sufficiently contextual, and that all are paternalistic, in the sense of conveying from outside themes and vocabulary the authors consider significant. On the other hand, the richness of potential expansion in the word lists enables the pupils themselves to acquire a feeling of creativity and originality by making their own words and sentences. Thus the word casa, varied with other vowels, produces a whole family of syllables—ca, co, cu, sa, se, si, so, su—from which words like cosa, saco, casi, and seco can be derived. In the very first session, the group forms its own words and even simple sentences. To take an example that Freire often cites from Brasília, the first word used was tijolo, and an illiterate on the first night constructed, tu já lê, a slightly ungrammatical form that can be translated, "you already read." Within a few sessions the pupils have mastered sufficient syllables to express a wide vocabulary.

The third phase of the method develops teaching materials of two types. One is a set of cards or slides which break down the words into parts for more careful analysis. The second is a set of cards of pictorial situations, related to the words, which are designed to impress on the pupil through vision an image of the word, and also to stimulate his thinking about the situation that the word implies. In Brazil, Freire used pictures separated from the words, but in Chile he has combined the two. The pictures become the basis for dialogue, and as the examples illustrated on pages 8 and 9 indicate both the style and subjects are popular.

The actual literacy training in Brazil was preceded by at least three sessions of "motivation," in which the pupil entered into his new life through an analysis of the concept of culture. In Chile, this stage has been incorporated into the literacy training itself, for it was noted that the Chilean, unlike the Brazilian who liked discussion about himself as a creative, cultural being, tended to lose interest if he did not begin to learn immediately. In Freire's method, the beginning of a critical, as opposed to a magical, outlook comes from distinguishing between nature and culture: nature is viewed as a matrix in which man lives, culture as an addition that man contributes through his own work. It is important to recognize that for Freire culture is not the property of the learned, something that the pupil may acquire only after he can read and write; rather, culture is something that all men have. A picture that he commonly uses shows an Indian shooting a bird with a bow and arrow and illustrates the control that even primitive men have over nature through their creations. The illiterate discovers that culture is relative; through the pictures he sees that he already has culture and a certain domination over the word itself, even though he was previously not conscious of this fact.

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[A]

[B]

casa

[C]

fábrica

[D]

It is not surprising therefore that the method of Paulo Freire is usually linked with "popular culture" movements which emphasize the creativity of the people and seek to promote new forms among them. Popular culture collides with the imitative cultural tendencies of the Latin American upper and middle classes; and Chileans, especially, propagate a carefully cultivated myth that their country is culturally the "most European" in Latin America, as if a second-rate imitation were something to be proud of. What they obscure by this myth is the strong indigenous component in the lower-class culture and in popular artistic creations that bear the mark of originality. Perhaps nothing more clearly reveals the chasm between the upper and lower classes that the prevalence of this self-image of Europeanized homogeneity which supposedly distinguishes Chile from such neighbors as Peru and Bolivia.

Now the method. Picture A, which is the initial one of a series of eight used for cultural apprehension in Chile, depicts a peasant carrying an axe with which he intends to cut down a tree. From discussing this situation, the class realizes the existence of a world of nature and a world of culture. Through work, man alters the natural environment and creatively forms his culture. The co-ordinator elicits the meaning of the situation through a series of questions designed to provoke dialogue and self-discovery: What is the peasant doing? Who made the axe? What is the difference between the origin of the tree and the origin of the axe? Why does the man do what he is doing? How? The illiterate comes to understand that lack of knowledge is relative and that absolute ignorance does not exist. The mere fact of being human entails knowledge, control, and creativity.

Picture B, which is seventh in this series, depicts a group in which a couple is performing the cueca, a Chilean folk dance. The class discovers that man not only creates instruments for his physical necessities, but that he creates for artistic expression as well. Man has an aesthetic sense, and the popular manifestations of culture possess as legitimate a vitality and beauty as other forms. Again the co-ordinator asks questions: Why are these people dancing? Who invented the dance and other similar ones that you know? Why do men create music? Can a man who composes a cueca be a great composer? The situation aims at indicating that a man who composes popular music is as much an artist as a famous composer.

In Picture C, we enter the stage of literacy training itself. A class session is built around a word and a picture; and the group learns that one can symbolize a lived experience by drawing, reading, or writing it. Instead of the prosperous middle-class dwelling of the usual primer, we find a humble Chilean home and a family whose features are typical of the lower class. To the left is a somewhat shabbier house.

The literacy training involves a series of audio-visual techniques, such as repeating and recognizing the word, dissecting it into its component syllables, learning to write the letters and the word, and constructing new words from the components. The co-ordinator of the group guides the class in reflection and discussion on the meaning of "house," using such themes as the necessity of comfortable housing for family life, the problem of housing in the nation, the possibilities and ways of acquiring a house, types of dwellings in different regions and countries, and the problems of housing associated with urbanization. Provocative questions, such as the following, develop a critical attitude toward an everyday phenomenon: Do all Chileans have adequate houses? Where and why do they lack houses? Is the system of savings and loans sufficient for acquiring a house?

In Picture D, we find a different situation: a "factory" with a sign announcing "No Jobs." The attitudes reflected on the faces of the persons probably reflect real experience for many in the class. Even though the word is directed to a rural group, all have a personal interpretation of the meaning of a factory. The questions for discussion are the following: Where are the cloth that we wear, the tools with which we work, and the paper and pencil with which we write produced? Does the factory participate in the production of our food? And the construction of our houses? Why don't people produce most of the articles they need, as they used to do? Why do countries need to industrialize? Can Chile industrialize to a greater degree? What does a country need in order to develop itself industrially? What industries have the best possibilities in our country? Does industrial expansion influence rural areas? Do rural areas contribute to the process? Can one industrialize agriculture and the production of animals?

Obviously these questions are both simple and sophisticated. The Paulo Freire method itself has no answers for them, but experience indicates that common reflection by the pupils produces considerable understanding. My own most memorable impression from visiting these classes is of the capacity of people of limited education for thoughtful analysis and logical articulation of the issues when the issues are linked to their everyday life.

The key to the successful implementation of the method is the "co-ordinator," who does not "teach" but tries instead to promote self-discovery in the other participants through exploring the dimensions of the pictures. The livelier the debate, the greater the number of ideas and implications drawn and the richer and more meaningful the critical insight into the problems as well as the memory of the word. The co-ordinator tries to get all the members of the group to participate by directing questions to them, prolonging the discussion so that they will real-

ize the deeper meaning of what was once for them an obvious, accepted reality. He should not give his own opinions. Like group psychotherapy, the Paulo Freire method stimulates participants to move themselves, by realistic assessment of themselves and their environment, from inauthentic interpretations of life to creative initiative.

The Paulo Freire method does not aim chiefly at literacy training, but at what is called in Brazil "conscientização" and in Chile "concientización." The word first appeared, according to Freire, in discussions of the Higher Institute of Brazilian Studies (ISEB) in the late 1950's, but the term conveyed minimal content until Freire heard it and, realizing its implications, applied it to literacy training at about the same time as the Movement of Base Education (MEB), a system of radio schools sponsored by the Brazilian bishops, also began to use it.

Conscientización means an "awakening of consciousness," a change of mentality involving an accurate, realistic awareness of one's locus in nature and society; the capacity to analyze critically its causes and consequences, comparing it with other situations and possibilities; and action of a logical sort aimed at transformation. Psychologically it entails an awareness of one's dignity, or if we take part of the title of Freire's book, Educação como prática da liberdade, "the practice of freedom." Even though the stimulus to conscientizacion derives from interpersonal dialogue in which one discovers the meaning of humanity from encounters with other humans, an almost inevitable consequence is political participation and the formation of interest groups such as community organizations and labor unions.

Lack of consciousness is the fate of oppressed groups everywhere, and discriminatory social structures rely on this state of mind to prevent changes and challenges. The most apt parallel for North American readers is our black community, which is currently undergoing a process of conscientización. The close linkage between language and conscientización can be discerned by contrasting the subservient, fatalistic expressions of most blacks a generation ago with their present militant, confident vocabulary. Conscientización often leads to politization—perhaps even to violence (as we see in the United States)—when men become conscious of their rights and the lack of them.

Conscientización rests on certain value assumptions that have not received much implementation in Latin America: the equality of all men, their right to knowledge and culture, and their right to criticize their situation and act upon it. It also implies a faith in the capacity of even the illiterate to achieve a reflective outlook through self-discovery and dialogue.

Properly understood and applied, conscientización has no predictable directions. Although it does not prescribe politization, its content of dignity, criticism, and transformation almost inevitably leads to a quest for channels of effective action. If social dissatisfaction follows from the dialogues, it is because this is a part of the reality. Paulo Freire speaks of his method as "revolutionary." By this he primarily means a change of mentality that will inevitably have effects on the present system of class relations in Latin America, and undoubtedly will effect changes in political and economic structures as well. In this sense, the method is also "subversive"—subversive, that is, of an established and unchanging social order—but, in a play on words which Freire likes to make, he pointed out to me that while all "revolutionary" phenomena are "subversive," not all "subversive" phenomena are "revolutionary."

Both the Freire method and the concept of conscientización have attracted those who believe in its humanistic implications for the participation of the masses and also in the necessity of a rapid and decisive restructuring of society. One of its indubitable attractions is a freedom from either paternalism or outside ideologies: that is, it regards as invalid the manipulation of education and people in order either to maintain an archaic system or to impose perspectives alien to the context. Its only ideology is a kind of humanism that affirms the freedom and capacity of the people to decide their destinies. The people may choose to achieve their aims through an ideology, but the method does not presuppose that any such framework of meaning or social philosophy expresses the people's will and interests.

The Paulo Freire method first gained prominence after 1962 when Brazil, affected by the example of Cuba which had almost eliminated illiteracy through a massive campaign, was the scene of a movement by both private and public agencies eager to accomplish the same result. Paulo Freire had been conducting experiments in the Northeast which showed that his method could teach a person to read and write in six weeks, and conscientização was also being widely discussed among modernizing elites as a key to social and cultural development. Although the country had many of the industrial and structural symbols of economic development, it lacked the comprehension and participation in the process of the population.

In 1963, the Brazilian Ministry of Education committed itself to a literacy campaign using the method of Paulo Freire. Within eight months, training courses for co-ordinators were conducted in nearly every state—with 6,000 persons volunteering in the state of Guanabara alone. Students were among the most vigorous participants in the courses; and it was anticipated that by 1964, 20,000 "circles of culture" would be

under way, teaching and "conscientizing" two million people in a course lasting three months. Thus, the forty million Brazilian illiterates would be eliminated within a few years. The revolutionary implications of the method were freely discussed and accepted, since those who participated believed that the country was in a pre-revolutionary situation.

The Paulo Freire method, like many interesting ideas and events of this period, frightened many people and suffered constant attack, particularly from the influential Rio de Janeiro daily O Globo. The basic charge was that the method was stirring up the people, giving them ideas about changing things, and consequently fomenting subversion.

The Brazilian governmental change of 1964 had many causes, but none was more fundamental than the fear of the upper and middle classes that the country was undergoing a shift of power in which the majority of the population, the illiterate and semi-literate, would gain a voice commensurate with their numbers. By the simple expedient of forbidding illiterates to vote, half the potential electorate of the country had been disfranchised; while in many instances lack of consciousness had made possible the manipulation of those who did vote. If, then, to the modernizers, literacy training and conscientização represented the vehicles by which the country could move from a limited to a universal participation of the population, that is, democratization, it constituted a terror to those who enjoyed their monopoly of power. Both the middle and upper classes supported the coup from anxiety that their carefully accumulated privileges would be undercut by a proletarianization of society.

Since 1964, literacy training has continued in Brazil on a modest scale, but notably without conscientização. The most active agency at present in the Northeast is the Cruzada ABC, whose director is a North American Protestant minister. When I spoke to him in July 1967, he openly expressed his admiration for the government and seemed to show little understanding of Brazilian problems. Certainly, if the Paulo Freire method has political implications, the same can be said about the present system of literacy training: it is carefully planned to check expectations and to restrict the formation of a critical perspective.

In Chile, the Paulo Freire method is now used in all governmental programs of literacy training. The Chilean experience deserves extensive treatment, for if its present momentum continues, the country will reduce its rate of illiteracy within six years to a tolerable 5 per cent.

Before 1964, literacy training was a sporadic and chiefly private endeavor. The Christian Democratic government, elected in that year, wanted to attack the problem as part of its program of "promotion." As President Frei recently pointed out in an address on the state of the na-

tion, his administration wants "to create broad forms of popular participation in the development of our community. Not only in party politics . . . but chiefly in the real expressions of our present life: those of work, neighborhood and regional life, family necessities and basic culture, and economic-social organization."

A Department of Special Planning for Education of Adults was created in mid-1965. Its director was Waldemar Cortés, a young Christian Democratic militant who had been involved in adult education for some years and was principal of a night school in Santiago. Cortés, like Freire before him, thought that both existent methods and materials needed revising, since ordinarily those used for children were simply applied to adults. "By chance," someone told him of a Brazilian in Chile named Freire, "who had some ideas on adult education." Although Cortés had never heard of the Brazilian experiments in literacy training, he discovered that Freire had worked out in detail all of his own hunches on the subject.

The problem then became that of gaining acceptance in Chile for a method considered subversive in Brazil. A number of people in the Christian Democratic party thought that the method was "radical" and even "Communist." Others wanted to use literacy programs for the interests of the party. With persuasion and effort, however, Cortés managed to get the program accepted; and to counter criticism of partisanship, he chose for his chief technical team people representing a variety of political positions.

The Department of Special Planning for Education of Adults functions as the co-ordinator of programs that are actually carried out by other agencies. A wide variety of institutions in Chile, chiefly public but also private, have "promotion" as a central objective: for example, those associated with the agrarian reform, the Corporation of Agrarian Reform (CORA) and the Institute of Agrarian and Livestock Development (INDAP). CORA expropriates property and forms agricultural communities (asentimientos) preparatory to establishing individual ownership, while INDAP provides credit and technical assistance to small farmers; and since most illiteracy is found in rural areas, these agencies are natural vehicles for bringing people together into groups. Moreover, the Chilean agrarian reform not only aims at increasing production but also at "promoting" the more effective functioning and integration into society of neglected social groups. Among other agencies in close contact with illiterates are the National Health Service (which combines literacy and sanitation training), the Service of Prisons, and the Department of Popular Promotion (which encourages the formation of community organizations). Within the social vision or "ideology" of Christian Democracy, these institutions do not simply serve technical functions, but also try to

overcome the separation between those who participate effectively in society and those who do not. The Department has recently signed agreements for literacy training with certain Protestant churches, which in some isolated communities are the only institutions available.

The Department develops teaching material and gives training to co-ordinators, who then function within the program of the other agencies. These agencies sign an agreement with the Department, depositing an amount of money which is used to pay the co-ordinators. Originally, the program relied in part on volunteers, but, to guarantee stability, quality, and conscientiousness, stipends are now the policy. The co-ordinators, who are usually primary-school teachers, are chosen from the local community on the recommendation of the agency involved. The Department trains them in dialogue and the aims of the Paulo Freire method in a course that takes about thirty hours.

One of the most common criticisms is that the co-ordinators do not themselves achieve a sufficient change from their former paternalistic attitudes to internalize the spirit of the method. I myself feel, after observing several classes, that they do tend to dominate the situation too much, though this does not inhibit many fine contributions by the participants. Both Waldemar Cortés and Paulo Freire admit that this is a permanent problem. Cortés thinks that his Department has improved the situation bit by bit since the program's hasty beginning in Chile; while Freire believes that the method requires frankness in eliminating those who do not have the right mentality and the periodic reviews and retraining of co-ordinators through careful supervision and seminars.

The Chilean program has attracted international attention in its mere two years of effective functioning; and Chile recently received an award from UNESCO as one of the five nations which are most effectively overcoming the problem of illiteracy. This year the Department calculates that it will have approximately 100,000 pupils and 2,000 co-ordinators functioning. The continuity of the program is menaced, however, by the fact that it has only a provisional status linked to the present government. Cortés would like to see a permanent division of adult education —one as fundamental, for example, as primary education—that would survive any political change in 1970.

The Department of Special Planning for Education of Adults, as its name implies, not only deals with literacy but also with a range of programs designed to enable people who have not had educational opportunities to overcome their handicap. In a recent evaluation, the Department high-lighted the desire of those who have become literate through the Paulo Freire method to continue their studies at higher levels.

The fact, however, that the initial stage of conscientización requires supplementation by more advanced "content" suggests a problem. What kinds of things should a person learn? What attitude should the pupil take toward the material? Let us recall Paulo Freire's view that no education is neutral?

Perhaps this problem can be illustrated by referring to two quite different primers developed for the secondary-level after initial literacy training. The first comes from the Movement of Base Education in Brazil and is called Vivir é Lutar ("To Live Is To Struggle"); the second is used in the Chilean program and is called Comunidad ("Community"). The following are a couple of typical passages from the former: "I live and I struggle. Pedro lives and struggles. The people live and struggle. I, Pedro, and the people struggle. We struggle to live. To live is to struggle." "Pedro is disturbed and thinks. Why is our life so harsh? Why do so many children die here? Why don't the people have housing? Why don't the people learn to read? Why aren't there schools for our children? Why do the people suffer so much injustice?" (I should add that this primer was confiscated by the government of the state of Guanabara as "subversive" even before the coup.) In Comunidad, along with a range of useful knowledge, we find such passages as these: "So that governments can achieve the plans for collective welfare they need the support of the population. The community, therefore, ought to organize itself and unite its forces to that of government and thus be able to better its economic, social, and cultural conditions." "The struggle to elevate the level of life in the country and permit each Chilean to enjoy better conditions of life and a larger quantity of goods and essential services . . . is what is called Economic and Social Development. Chile is engaged in this great enterprise."

The differences in the two primers may be explained only in part by the two different national contexts and the fact that the former emanates from a group outside power, the other from a group participating in it. At stake are two diverging interpretations of the Latin American reality, of the relation between "integrated" and "marginal" segments of society, and of the nature of change. Which one is correct? The Paulo Freire method does not tell us. Only those who live in the world of the illiterate understand that world and can interpret it.

NOTE

Two articles have recently appeared in the United States which specifically refer to the Paulo Freire method without discussing it in detail: Ivan D. Illich, "The Futility of Schooling in Latin America," Saturday Review (April 20, 1968); Henrique C. de Lima Vaz, "The Church and 'Conscientização,'" America (April 27, 1968). The most thorough statement of the Paulo Freire method is in Freire's own book, Educação como prática da liberdade (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1967). A translation of this book will soon appear in Spanish through the Instituto de Capacitación y Investigación en Reforma Agraria, Santiago, Chile. Shorter statements may be found in Freire, "Alfabetización de adultos y 'conscientización,'" Mensaje (September, 1965), and "Método Paulo Freire," in Lauro de Oliveira Lima, Tecnologia, educação e democracia (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1965).

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